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RACIAL CONTACT, PERSONALITY, AND GROUP PROBLEM SOLVING.

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DESCRIPTORS- *RACE RELATIONS, RACIAL COMPOSITION, GROUP BEHAVIOR, *INTERACTION PROCESS ANALYSIS, TASK PERFORMANCE, PRODUCTIVITY,

THIS STUDY TESTS THE HYPOTHESIS THAT BIRACIAL GROUPS IN WHICH RACEMATES WERE PAIRED FOR DIRECT CONTACT WOULD PERFORM BETTER THAN THOSE IN WHICH RACEMATES WERE ISOLATED. IT ALSO ASSUMED THAT ETHNOCENTRIC SUBJECTS WOULD PERFORM BETTER WITH CONTACT WITH A RACEMATE, AND THAT AGGRESSIVE SUBJECTS WOULD GET ALONG WELL WITHOUT IT. THE SUBJECTS WERE BOYS FROM A MULTIRACIAL HIGH SCHOOL IN A LOW SOCIO-ECONOMIC AREA OF DETROIT. EACH BOY DECIDED WHICH THING, FROM A CHOICE OF FOUR, ALL THE OTHER PARTICIPANTS (IDENTIFIED BY A COLOR PHOTOGRAPH) WHOM HE CONTACTED BY TELEPHONE, HAD IN COMMON. RESULTS SHOW THAT GROUP STRUCTURE MADE NO DIFFERENCE IN PERFORMANCE. THE AGGRESSIVE-XENOPHILIC WAS THE ONLY TYPE THAT DID IMPROVE WITH CONTACT BETWEEN RACEMATES. THE STUDY SHOWED THAT ALTHOUGH CONTACT BETWEEN RACEMATES INFLUENCES COLLECTIVE BEHAVIOR, ETHNOCENTRISM, AGGRESSIVENESS, AND RACIAL BALANCE DETERMINE WHETHER INTERACTION WILL FACILITATE OR INTERFERE WITH GROUP PRODUCTIVITY. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE AMERICAN PHYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION ANNUAL MEETING (WASHINGTON, SEPTEMBER 1967). (SR)

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Racial Contact, Personality, and Group Problem Solving

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About ten years ago Irwin Katz and his associates (Katz, Goldston & Benjamin, 1958; Katz & Benjamin, 1960) began publishing studies on the behavior of Negroes in biracial work groups. They found generally that Negroes deferred white partners--sometimes at the expense of accuracy--even when they had been matched on ability. In a later experiment Katz & Cohen (1962) were able to overcome the Negro's inhibition by training him to be more assertive--forcing him to exercise his own judgement before he could be influenced by the white partner.

It appeared in the Katz studies that lack of confidence, fear of failure, and of consequent social rejection, were the basis of the inhibited performance of Negroes in biracial work groups. Katz was able to overcome such fears by inducing the Negro to demonstrate to himself that he was <u>not</u> rejected after exercising initiative.

Another means of accomplishing the same thing without forcing task behavior might be to provide <u>social support</u> to the insecure Negro. Taking a cue from the affilation studies of Schachter and his associates (Schachter, 1959; Wrightsman, 1960) --that fearful people not only want company, but want the company of others <u>with the same fate</u>--we assumed that contact of one Negro with another Negro would ease the anxiety of each in a biracial situation and improve their contributions to the performance of the group as a whole.

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The present study examines the effects of both social support and personality in mixed groups of Negro and white high school boys. We chose as the group's task a problem which was complex socially as well as intellectually, and was likely therefore to arouse both fear of failure and social rejection in subjects lacking self-confidence--in particular, Negroes facing white

achievement standards and prejudice. We supposed, however, that such fears might be reduced, and performance enhanced, by providing social support.

Figures 1 and 2 show two circle-type communication networks which enabled us to test these assumptions. In Figure 1, Negroes and whites alternate around the circle, so that racemates are isolated from one another communicationally. If they communicate, it must be thru a person of the other race. In Figure 2, racemates have direct contact with each other as well as with one person of the other race. This is accomplished by pairing racemates around the circle: Negro-Negro-white-white. We also ran all-Negro and all-white groups for comparison, shown in Figures 3 and 4.

At this point let me introduce two personality characterisics which we assumed would mediate reactions to threat of failure or of rejection. These are ethnocentrism and aggressiveness. Groups in the last two columns of Table 1 were made up entirely of subjects who were "ethnocentric"--that is, of Negroes who by our tests favored Negroes as friends and as a societal group, and whites who favored whites. In the first two columns all group members were "xenophilic"--the white members showed a strong positive regard for Negroes, and the Negroes for whites. We assumed that ethnocentric Negroes would derive support from contact with another Negro, and that ethnocentric whites would feel more secure by contact with another white, but that xenophilic subjects would be relatively indifferent to racemates.

Half the ethnocentric groups and half the xenophilic groups were composed of members who were "aggressive," and half who were "non-aggressive." "Aggressive" subjects described themselves as more aggressive, dominating, achievement-oriented, and autonomous, but less affiliative, blame-avoidant, infavoidant, and self-abasive than other subjects.

Our main hypothesis was that biracial groups in which racemates were paired for direct contact would perform better than those in which racemates

were isolated. We supposed that ethnocentric subjects especially would appreciate contact with a racemate, and that aggressive subjects would get along just as well without it.

The subjects were boys from a multi-racial high school in a low socio-economic area of Detroit. Members of each group were seated in individual booths after having met each other briefly during a demonstration of the task. Each member had a telephone to contact the boy at his left, and another 'phone to contact the boy on his right. The race of the boy at the other end of either telephone line was always apparent, since his photograph--in color--was displayed just above that phone. Each boy had a set of four cards with a different oval on each card. Ovals differed in width, tilt, and location. The problem was to determine, by telephoning, which oval all four members had in common. Eight trials of this task were run, using a new set of ovals for each member on each trial. Altogether, 78 groups were run, with about 6 groups in each biracial cell, and about 3 groups in each uniracial cell.

Table 1 shows the percent of solutions given correctly by the members of each type of group. Analysis of variance was done for group means, taking group structure, ethnocentrism, and aggressiveness as independent variables.

By itself, group structure made no difference--the average performance of all racemate-contact-type biracial groups was not significantly better than that of isolation-type biracial groups, or of all-white or all-Negro groups. The main effect for aggressiveness was also nil. The main effect for ethnocentrism was significant at the .02 level, with better overall performance by xenophilic groups than by ethnocentric groups.

The triple interaction, significant at the .05 level, enables meaningful comparisons to be made among the 16 varieties of groups studied. In the upper half of Table 1 any difference of 10 or more is significant by Scheffe's test, and in the lower half any difference of 16 or more is significant.

First, note with respect to the social support hypothesis that contact with racemates promoted better group performance, compared with the isolation condition, only among xenophilic-aggressive groups, and not in ethnocentric and non-aggressive groups as we had expected. A look at the upper-right quadrant of the table indicates, in fact, that mixing ethnocentric whites and ethnocentric Negroes results in poor group performance regardless of aggressiveness or contact with racemates. This is not to say that ethnocentric subjects never perform well--the bottom half of the third column shows that groups composed entirely of ethnocentric Negroes or ethnocentric whites did very well if the members were aggressive.

To help interpret the mixed results with respect to racial contact and isolation, we analyzed communication within the various types of groups. All utterances were categorized and grouped as acts of leadership, followership, positive emotion, negative emotion, and "miscellaneous." Since communication analyses have been completed for only 53 of the 78 groups, these results must be regarded as tentative, and will be cited only qualitatively.

We could focus on the ethnocentric and non-aggressive groups which ought to have improved with contact between racemates but did not. In the few minutes which remain, however, it may be more profitable to focus on the only type which did improve when there was contact between racemates--the aggressive-xenophilic. To anticipate a conclusion, the Negro members of these groups may be thought of as "upwardly mobile" and "white-oriented." In the racemate-contact condition, these Negroes showed few leadership attempts, little compliance with other Negroes, but much compliance with whites. At the same time white assertiveness towards Negroes increased, compared with the isolation condition. This pattern is consistent with Katz & Cohen's finding that Negro subjects tend to communicate with white teammates and ignore Negroes--a finding also consistent with the idea that Negroes who succeed in entering white-dominated colleges are similar in character to our aggressive-xenophilic Negro

high school subjects. Most striking in these aggressive-xenophilic groups: positive and negative emotional acts between Negroes completely disappear when contact with a racemate is given, compared with their rather high rate of emotional acts--and low productivity--in all-Negro groups. Thus it appears that the good performance of these aggressive-xenophilic groups may be due to the Negroes' orientation toward the white partner, minimizing interaction with the other Negro in the situation, who may be seen as a rival. Good performances of these groups seem to be due to Negro acceptance of white assertiveness, and the simplicity of having only one white partner to deal with. In isolation-type groups, where whites as well as Negroes were separated from their racemate, whites tended to be inhibited, and Negro members distributed their leadership attempts between the two whites with whom each had contact.

The social support hypothesis may operate for non-upwardly mobile types, but to the detriment of the task goals set by the experimenter. Ethnocentric and non-aggressive groups showed increased Negro-to-Negro interaction under racemate contact, but this did not improve group performance. Here, racemate contact appears to have led instead to racial clique-formation--to the detriment of the whole group's work.

Contact between Negroes or between whites in biracial groups need not always be divisive. Results of a more recent study of racially unbalanced groups shows positive effects of contact between racemates. We studied groups with two Negroes and one white, or two whites and one Negro, where one person is central in a linear communication network and the other two are peripheral. Here we found that the whole group does better if there is an ethnocentric central man who has contact with a racemate. We also found that if two Negroes are peripheral and a white is the central man, that the group does better if the white central man is non-aggressive. Thus peripheral Negroes may work effectively for the group if they are linked by a friendly and compliant white member.

Both studies taken together indicate that contact between racemates influences collective behavior, but that ethnocentrism, aggressiveness, and racial balance determine whether interaction will <u>facilitate</u> or <u>interfere</u> with group productivity.

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Fig. 1
Isolation-type
biracial

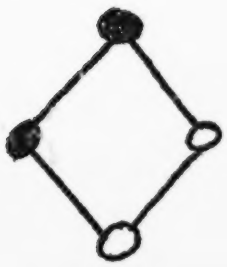

Fig. 2
Access-type
biracial

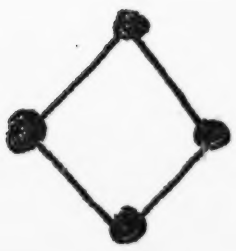

Fig. 3
All Negro

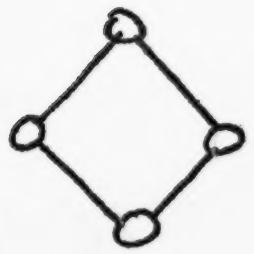

Fig. 4
All White

	Xenophilic		Ethnocentric	
	Aggressive	Non-aggressive	Aggressive	Non-aggressive
Access-type biracial	71	52	46	47
Isolation-type biracial	61	66	48	45
All-Negro	30	62	78	44
All-White	63	61	67	39